Acorn

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NEWS LETTER

ARM move to Swaffham

With a level of speed and efficiency that astonished the removal professionals, ARM moved into its new building in Swaffham Bulbeck complete with lock, stock and barrel, just fifteen days after signing the lease!

Most of the preparations for the move were hastily completed in the final days. Up until late January, ARM had been planning to go to Venture Park in Histon. But when the Barn in Swaffham Bulbeck came up, plans were changed.

ARM's new premises was originally a dilapidated barn. All the old fabric of the 200-year-old building was stripped away until only the timber frame skeleton remained, then reconstructed with concrete and steel before being clad with timber and crowned with clay peg tiles. The only original part of the building – the timber frame – now appears as exposed beams in all the large rooms. Of particular interest is the staircase which has acorn-shaped finials and an inscription 'Harvey 1774' carved in one of the old beams! Could it be haunted by an ex-MD's ancestors?

Robin Saxby remembers the final days leading up to the move with considerable amusement. 'We had to make all our decisions in a very short time and, as a result, had streams of furniture and other suppliers queuing up to see us all through the week. Moving during the peak of a recession is no bad thing – we were able to negotiate some very keen deals!'

John Marshall supervised the office networking which had to be completed in advance of the move. Special consideration was given to the age of the building and Andy Smith crawled through some very tiny spaces to make sure that virtually all the cabling is completely hidden.

Communication during this period was rather comical. To begin with there was no phone connected and the Barn is in a dead area as far as cellular phones are concerned. 'I gave them my bleeper', explains John, 'so that I could call them from Fulbourn Road. Then they had to go to the end of the yard with the cellphone to call me and find out what I wanted.'

The removal men had estimated it would take till midnight to complete the move. In the event, everything was in place by 8 pm. Lee Smith came in the following day to make sure that all the systems were up and running.

'Everyone did their bit', says Robin, 'and I'm especially grateful to David Lowdell who organised everything so smoothly.' ■

RAF invests in Acorn

Fighter pilots probably receive some of the most expensive and sophisticated training in the world, second only to astronauts. It's therefore particularly satisfying to learn that 30 Acorn 440s will be playing an important role in that training from now on. The machines have been ordered by RAF Wyton who will also be using the new Avanti authoring system.

Farther afield, at Biggin Hill, 55 Archimedes workstations will be used to completely re-equip the RAF's aircrew selection facility. During a two-day selection process, would-be pilots are subjected to a battery of computer tests and simulations which assess their ability to understand instruments and their overall aptitude for controlling modern fighter planes.

Even farther afield, ten more Archimedes workstations have been sent to the armed forces in the United Arab Emirates. ■

New Zealand to get Acorn Artillery Training Systems

Watching the daily TV coverage of the Gulf War has brought home to many of us the realities of modern warfare. Like the fact that soldiers have to fire their weapons at targets so far in the distance that visual contact is out of the question.

The Westland Indirect Fire Trainer (WIFT) simulates a firing ground complete with realistic scenery, and teaches gunners how to respond to information provided on Radar and by observers in the field.

The WIFT system is based on Archimedes technology and is already used by the British Army. A further five units have now been ordered by the army in New Zealand and Warwick Hurst is very hopeful that further business will be generated in Canada (which already has one unit in use) and Australia. ■

Roamin' Robin heads up ARM

Robin Saxby, ARM Ltd Managing Director

New ARM MD Robin Saxby is attracted by the lure of faraway places and exotic cultures and would love one day to follow in the footsteps of Michael Palin and see the world. But, for the moment, he will have to be satisfied with the trek between Cambridge and Maidenhead, where he still lives with his wife Patti and children Katy (12) and Neil (9).

At 44, Robin has already notched up thousands of air miles having travelled extensively since the early 70s when he was employed by Motorola Semiconductors in an international selling role.

Having graduated in electronic engineering, Robin spent five years in R&D. In 1968 he designed a chip with 50 transistors and 50 resistors!

After ten years at Motorola, Robin moved to Henderson Security Systems as Managing Director. Two years later he was appointed Managing Director of a new European company called ES2 (European Silicon Structures) and President of its US equivalent US2 (United Silicon Structures).

Robin recalls that starting up ES2 was particularly exciting as the company's management team was drawn from all over Europe. 'When I started sales were zero, but they took off during the first year and grew thereafter at an average compound rate of 50 per cent per annum.

'Now I'm looking forward to watching another new business develop. I'm grateful to Acorn and Apple for creating the company, especially to Malcolm Bird of Acorn and Larry Tesler of Apple, who were ARM's principal architects.

'We're operating in a very competitive world, but we've got great people, great products and great technology. We're mere Davids against a lot of Goliaths, but the little guys can still win if they're sufficiently creative.'

Robin likes tennis but really enjoys skiing. He plays the piano (badly), and needs no encouragement to play with the children's computer games and electronic toys. ■

The stork cometh!

Acorn Australia will be losing Kathy Constantinidou to maternity leave. While this is Kathy's third child it is only her second pregnancy! Yes, she had twins the first time. As the twins are both boys she is hoping for a girl this time. ■

What happens to all those appraisals?

By now all of you should have received your annual appraisal, and many of you may be wondering what happens next.

Once it arrives in the personnel department, each appraisal is carefully examined to see what it reveals. Is there a need for specific training? If the person has been trained, have the benefits of the course started to show themselves? Does the person's job title reflect his or her new accountability and responsibilities?

'The appraisal system plays an important role in career development', explains Lorraine Buckman. 'But it's important that people understand that we are not here to mastermind everyone's future. It is up to the individual to speak up when they feel they need further training and to let us know if they have aspirations in a particular direction.'

'We have to look at strengths and aspirations together', says Janet Henson-Webb. 'There's not much point in giving someone a job in administration just because he or she is brilliant at it. It may be the last thing in the world they want to do!'

Training within Acorn is very much geared to the appraisal system and affordability. 'Usually the training needs are quite straightforward', explains Janet, 'and I just send the manager the relevant course details. But sometimes I need to do considerable research to find a suitable course.'

In addition, the appraisal system helps to provide an overall picture of many personnel issues. 'It could help us to pinpoint a morale trouble-spot if there are lots of complaints about one particular area; it can help us judge the effectiveness of training courses; and it is a vital tool when it comes to succession planning', explains Janet.

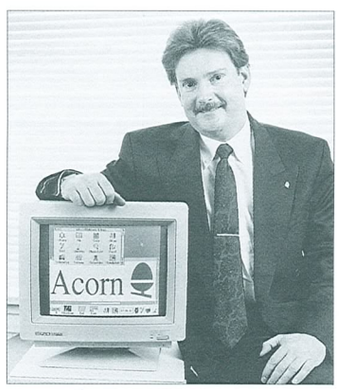
'When we have finished with an appraisal it is filed on the particular individual's personnel file', adds Janet. 'But that is unlikely to happen until at least 15 months after we've received it. We refer to them continuously during the year, then compare them with the next appraisal once that is available.' ■

Gary gets into shape

Looking after figures seems to be Gary Johnson's preoccupation – both during and after work. After a hard week's work as Acorn's new Finance Director, Gary 'relaxes' on the soccer pitch, on the squash court, or on the running track.

Thirty-five-year-old Gary gives a fresh twist to the traditional accountancy career path which usually starts with a university education. Leaving school at 15, Gary worked on a building site and studied for his A levels on a part-time basis. With three A levels under his belt he still didn't know what career to pursue so took up delivering cars.

Eventually – no doubt much to his parents' relief – he decided to enter accountancy and joined a London practice. After eight years with the firm he was wooed away by a small PC company who needed a good accountant.



Gary Johnson

Eighteen months later he moved to a company which markets high-tech equipment to Eastern Europe. This involved extensive travel to Russia, Poland and Czechoslovakia during 1985, long before Gorbachev's glasnost.

Gary then joined Nixdorf Computers as Financial Controller. When he joined, the company was turning over about £39m with some 311 employees. Five years later, when Gary left, these figures had grown to £120m turnover and 1,200 employees.

'My own department expanded from 24 people to 42. We were growing so fast we were constantly opening new offices. In the end we had to build a new headquarters costing £30m. They were very exciting times.

'Acorn reminds me of Nixdorf when I first joined – friendly and not stifled with too many procedures. There's plenty of enthusiasm and a willingness to succeed. That's why I believe the company has real potential.' ■

Attention all cyclists

Contact Gary Johnson, our new Finance Director, if you would be interested in taking part in the London to Cambridge bike ride which takes place at the end of July. ■

Sydney brings teachers in out of the hot

Our Sydney office recently invited teachers from the New South Wales area to come and look at Acorn equipment and software. The response far exceeded expectations, especially since the teachers were charged a small attendance fee!

Three one-day seminars were held but the barbecue was cancelled due to temperatures reaching 110°. Instead, the teachers were treated to refreshments in air-conditioned comfort. Such was the success of the events that Sydney office has now bought a new coffee machine with the profits! Cheers!

Martin goes medieval . . .

If you've ever wondered what it must have been like to live in the 15th century, you should talk to Acorn's technical author, Martin Ley, who is something of an expert on the subject.

Eight or nine times a year, Martin sets off with his historical re-enactment group, The White Company, to spend the weekend demonstrating to tourists how people lived during the Wars of the Roses.

The weekend's activities might include a mock battle, cooking meals on an open fire (and eating them!), spinning, weaving, dancing, bow-making, armour-making, and so on.

Martin makes his own bows from lemonwood and hemp, using traditional tools wherever possible. Other members of The White Company make equally important equipment such as tents, clothing and weapons. The money for these is raised through the charges made to people like the Welsh Tourist Board and English Heritage when they ask The White Company to put on a demonstration for them.

Highlights in Martin's calendar are a week in September, when the Company goes to France and spends a whole week as if in medieval times, and two weeks at Kentwell Hall in Long Melford. 'Kentwell is a Tudor manor house half-way between Bury and Sudbury', explains Martin. 'About 300 people from re-enactment groups up and down the country are invited to spend up to three weeks living as people did in the 16th century. After two weeks behaving and thinking like they did 400 years ago, and talking in 16th-century-speak, it can be difficult to readjust to the 20th century!

Wedding bells

Carol Harris is getting married in September, and her husband-to-be, Tony Cartwright, also comes from the world of computers. Tony is Victorian Manager, Computer Software and Technical Support, for Telecom Australia.

In what may be a strange quirk of fate the two Australians met romantically on the Greek islands about 18 months ago. They'd like to spend their honeymoon on a desert island and, as these are in short supply, any suggestions will be gratefully received. Both appear to have a large number of relatives as the current guest list is well over the 200-mark.

Looking into Acorn technical publications . . .

Last year Acorn published 26 manuals – a total of 5,000 printed pages. Paul Garside, manager, believes this places Acorn just behind Cambridge University Press as the second-largest publisher in the area. At least 250,000 copies are printed and distributed throughout the world each year.

Three years ago Acorn publications were produced in a wide range of sizes and styles on six different systems. Much of the work was parcelled out to sub-contractors and it was very difficult to achieve consistency.

Today, Acorn's team of technical authors handle virtually everything in-house. Working alongside Paul Garside are Jim Fallon, senior technical author, and Stephen le Pla, Mike Hardy, Martin Ley and Dennis Harris. Their job is made substantially easier with the help of their desktop publishing system, FrameMaker, which is reckoned to be the best technical publishing software in the world.

In an effort to maintain consistency, the department has produced a 60-page style guide which provides useful guidelines for people who need to write for Acorn. The second edition of this is due to be published shortly and will be sold as an Acorn book.

One of the department's main challenges is bridging the gap between the Acorn programmer and the end-user. 'It's important for us to distance ourselves from the programmer to some extent', explains Paul, 'otherwise the user might not understand what we're talking about.

'To help us gauge the effectiveness of our manuals', he adds, 'we provide a form for readers' comments in each of our manuals. These come back into the department on a regular basis, and we've implemented a number of the suggestions made on them. We also talk to education authorities, IT centres and others to find out whether they have any particular problems with our documentation.'

Alex brightens up a Polish Easter

With a Polish father, and a Polish wife, it is not surprising to discover that senior design engineer, Alex Bienek, is concerned about the welfare of the people of Poland.

He is heavily involved with the Cambridge branch of a charity known as Medical Aid to Poland which was originally set up some ten years ago by Lech Walesa. Money raised in the Cambridge area, throughout the year, is used to buy essential medical supplies. This is supplemented by goods donated by the region's hospital services and sent by the truckload to a 600-bed children's hospital in the Polish town of Kielce.

Realising that the next truck to leave would arrive in Poland at Easter-time, Alex decided it would be nice to add a few Easter treats for the children. Chocolate is extremely hard to come by in Poland, so even the smallest Easter egg or chocolate bar would be a real treat.

After putting out an appeal on E-mail, Alex raised £145 from within Acorn. All the money was converted into a wide variety of chocolate treats and packed into the truck to arrive in time for Easter.

New Names New Faces

Gary Johnson –
Finance Director

Janet Cordy –
Part-time Receptionist,
Fulbourn Road

Fran Brindley –
Secretary, Sales and Marketing –
Consumer Markets

Melanie Lilley –
Customer Services Assistant

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Company Events
14 June:
Concert, Corn Exchange

Consumer Business Unit
29 - 30 May:
NAIDEX, Manchester

27 - 28 June:
Research/Rebab,
Bristol University

Education Business Unit
22 - 25 April:
Subject Advisers' Roadshow

29 April - 1 May:
AA Northern Ireland Roadshow

1 May:
Adviser Meeting

2 May:
Hants Schoolex, Eastleigh

9 - 15 May:
AA Northern Poly Roadshow

3 - 5 June:
AS Home Counties Roadshow

VAR Business Unit
29 April - 1 May:
Medical Show,
Brighton Imaging Exhibition

Peter held at Bangkok

Acorn Australia's Sales and Marketing Manager, Peter Revell, has found following Baden Powell's adage 'Be Prepared' hard to stick to while travelling internationally. On his trip to the UK to attend BETT, poor Peter found his frank features were not enough for the Bangkok airport authorities.

Peter set off the security alarm and was immediately backed into a corner by the armed guards who frisked him and confiscated his pet Swiss Army knife. Despite assurances from the guards, Peter still does not have his knife back, but has promised not to travel so heavily armed in future.

John Irving, who handles Acorn Australia's public relations, had a similar experience with an innocuous letter opener he had purchased in Singapore for his son before arriving in Europe for an extended stay. 'It didn't seem to matter whether it was in my hand luggage or my case. At every airport I had to remove it from my bag so it could be given to the pilot. Then I had to find the airline's office at the next airport to get it back again. The fifth time I decided it was costing more in time and aggravation than it was worth and made a present of it to a Customs Officer in Bremen. That turned out to be a bit of a mistake as it took fifteen minutes to find and fill out the forms surrendering ownership!'

Mother and baby doing well

Marion Caine is congratulating herself on the arrival of her lovely new daughter – Rebecca Marianne. Rebecca arrived in the early hours of 7th March and weighed in at 6lb 2oz.

Earlier, a sweepstake was organised to guess the weight and sex of the baby. Warwick Hirst's secretary, Elaine Warren, demonstrated her considerable skill in this area and walked off with the prize money. 'I used the money to buy a present for Marion and went straight off to see her in hospital', she said.

Marion hopes to return to work as Gary Johnson and David McKay's secretary in June.

Felicitations, Felicity

Felicity Carter, who joined Acorn Australia last year as receptionist, has been made Personal Assistant to Managing Director Bob Moir. Felicity, 24, has already acquired wide experience in office administration.

Virtually straight from school Felicity was office manager of a legal firm in Brisbane before coming to Melbourne to work in a similar post with a large employment consultancy.

'I find the work at Acorn both different and interesting. I didn't realise the scope of computers in education before I came here', says Felicity. Her hobbies include reading, cooking, aerobics and bushwalking.

Contributions to 'Comment' via E-mail

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